

British Lepidoptera Collecting in 1978

By C. G. M. DE WORMS*

Though January opened with a few mild days, the subsequent winter period was on the whole much more severe and inclement than for some five previous years, with continuous cold spells and a good deal of snow with blizzards in the south of England, especially in February. No profitable collecting was possible during these first two months when the daily temperature did not rise above the 40's. However, a milder spell began during the last few days of February bringing forth the first geometeres, mainly with the appearance of *Erannis leucophaearia* L. and *Phigalia pedaria* F. on the 23rd at Woking, followed by *Orthosia gothica* L. on the 26th, and *O. incerta* Hufn. the next day in my m.v. trap.

March began with some really congenial conditions which were prevailing on the 5th when I accompanied Mr. Peter Baker on Chobham Common in search of willow stems containing the galls made by the larvae of *Aegeria flaviventris* Staud., but very few cut stems with swellings were inhabited by this clearwing. On March 10th the thermometer rose to the 60's which tempted out the first hibernating butterflies, both the Brimstones and the Small Tortoiseshells, but this sudden onset of warmth was soon to be succeeded by a very rainy spell which was prevalent when I visited Kent on the 17th. Nothing was forthcoming in the Folkestone area or near Rye when I went over to Mr. Michael Tweedie on the 19th. By this time the season was showing signs of lateness with the willows hardly in bloom. But they were really at their best over the Easter period which started with Good Friday as early as 24th March. That day I travelled to Dorset in bright sunshine to stay with my relative near Blandford. But virtually nothing was on the wing the next day in the Wimborne region when I met Mr. R. Hatton and his wife and went to their home just to the north near Holt, in spite of the fine weather which gave way on Easter Sunday to dullness and rain. On the Bank Holiday I went on to Mockbeggar near Ringwood to stay with the late Mr. George Woollatt, but conditions were not much improved by day, though better by night for his m.v. trap which produced some 80 insects on the first occasion. These included a few *Achlya flavicornis* L. and *Biston strataria* Hufn., also several *Orthosia munda* D. & S. together with many *O. gothica* L., *O. cruda* D. & S., *O. stabliis* D. & S. and *O. incerta* Hufn., but only single examples of *Xylocampa areola* D. & S. and *Apocheima hispidaria* D. & S. The next night was of a very similar pattern with some 60 visitors and almost all the species already mentioned but with the addition of *Conistra vaccinii* L., several more *X. areola* and a single *Pachynemina hippocastanaria* Hübn. A visit to Godshill Enclosure on March 28th was marred through heavy rain. However, conditions had improved considerably when I went on to Brockenhurst on the 29th, with *Aglais urticae* L. flying in

* Three Oaks, Shores Road, Woking, Surrey.

Admiral Torlesse's garden near Sway, also later that day in that of Mr. C. H. Dixon near Micheldover. Back in Surrey, the temperature reached 60°F on March 30th, with *Gonepteryx rhamni* L. again on the wing. In fact March went out very lamb-like with the first days of April quite congenial. But these conditions soon gave way to quite a cool spell, which lasted till the middle of the month with considerable snow on the 11th. Very little was moving till the 18th when some warmth returned after this inclement spring period. The ensuing week was much more conducive to the appearance of the Notodontidae, especially *Odontosia carmelita* Esp. which was well out by the third week of April. On the 25th I travelled to Steeple Barton, north of Oxford to stay with Dr. H. Kettlewell, but his m.v. trap was virtual blank after heavy rain, which persisted all the following day when I returned to Surrey. The last day of April was spent beating loe blossom on the Surrey-Sussex border, but without success in obtaining any larvae of *Chloroclystis chloërata* Mab.

After a chilly start, May 3rd proved a glorious day when I travelled once more to the New Forest and visited Adm. Torlesse en route to a meeting of Scientific Committee in Lyndhurst, but nothing was seen on the wing till the following day, when the temperature reached 70°F in the shade and the first *Pieris rapae* L. appeared back at Woking. This onset of warmth continued during the ensuing week, and was still persisting when I motored on May 13th to stay with Ronald and Veronica Demuth at their delightful home near Bisley in the Cotswolds, which I have known for over twenty years.

My host had kindly arranged for me to plug in my m.v. trap at the home of Capt. Buddy, R.N., just outside Haresfield in the Severn Valley. Among only 29 visitors were many *Orthosia gothica*, as well as single examples of *Cerastus rubricosa* D. & S., *Orthosia gracilis* D. & S., *Apamea basilinea* D. & S., *Abrostola tripartita* Hufn., and *Lycia hirtaria* Clerck. However, the following night of the 14th with 44 individuals, produced a most pleasant surprise with a single specimen of the type, pale form, of *Xylomiges conspicillaris* L. my chief desideratum, together with most of the species cited above but with the addition of *Pheosia tremula* Clerck, *Cycnia mendica* Clerck and *Selenia bilunaria* Esp. After a dull day on the 14th when I visited Mr. George Mansell near Stroud, it was very warm and sunny when I left Watercombe House and spent the morning on Haresfield Beacon searching pine and other trunks in the local woods, which yielded both melanic forms of *Ectropis biundularia* Borkh. and the dusky form of *E. crepuscularia* D. & S. I then proceeded via Gloucester to the Forest of Dean, which was glorious with the vegetation just getting into full leaf. My destination was the Beaufort Hotel at Tintern, which has been my haven on many occasions since 1964. That evening Mr. Michael Leech came over from near Ross-on-Wye and we ran our m.v. light in a noted locality among beech and small-leaved lime adjoining the road to

Chepstow, up to 11 p.m. we saw the following ten species, mainly in singletons. These included *Notodonta ziczac* L., *N. trepida* Esp., *Colocasia coryli* L., *Orthosia incerta* Hufn., *Acasis viretata* Hübn., *Earophila baditat* D. & S., *S. bilunaria*, *E. biundularia*, *E. crepuscularia* and four *Celama confusalis* H.-S. It was another very sunny day when I toured the Forest of Dean on May 16th visiting Symond's after many years. but only a good many *Pieris napi* L. were seen over most of the Forest. It was equally fine on the 17th, when I went over to see Dr. Michael Harper just outside Ledbury, and saw the fruits of his m.v. trap run in his orchard under a low cliff face. Its contents included *P. tremula*, *P. gnoma* F., *N. trepida* Esp., *C. coryli*, *C. mendica*, *L. hirtaria* and *Menophra abruptaria* Thunb. I returned to the Wye Valley via Queen's Wood near Dymoke, where *P. napi* was flying in force. My outing on the 18th took me to near Brecon in Wales, to visit some friends in whose garden were flying several Green-veined Whites and Orange-tips. Both these insects were much in evidence on the 19th, another very fine day, when Dr. Neil Horton joined me at Tintern. In the afternoon we went over to a wood near Llandogo a few miles northward up the Wye Valley. There was a big stand of spruce where we flushed a number of *Thera albonigrata* Höfer, now distinguished from *T. variata* D. & S. which apparently has never existed in Britain. Adjacent to the spruce was some huge *Abies grandis*. Around the top of a smaller specimen of this fine tree were flitting a large number of the tiny tortrix *Eucosma subsequana* Haworth, of which my companion took several with much agility, as they were very difficult to follow in the dark background. My last day in these grand surroundings was spent making a further tour of the Forest of Dean in very warm conditions, but only a few Whites and Orange-tips were to be seen, mainly near the Speech House. During the week I had run my m.v. trap on four nights in the grounds of the Beaufort Hotel, but it attracted disappointingly few moths, among which were *P. tremula*, *C. mendica*, *C. coryli*, *O. incerta*, *O. gothica*, *O. gracilis* and *Scoliopteryx libatrix* L. I motored back to Surrey on the 21st via the Severn Bridge and the M4, again a very sunny occasion.

The last week of May proved to be probably the warmest of the whole year. This period included the Spring Holiday week-end. The common Whites and *A. cardamines* were in full force on the 28th, especially in King's Park Wood in the Chiddingfold area, where many Brimstones were flying together with a few *Clossiana euphrosyne* L. and the first *Leptidea sinapis* L. There were many *Pararge aegeria* L. and *Pseudopanthera macularia* L. in the rides sweltering in the upper 70's, while the last days of May saw the thermometer top 80°F in the shade. This great warmth was still prevalent during the opening days of June, when I revisited the Chiddingfold woods on the 3rd to find many more butterflies, in particular Wood Whites and both the small fritillaries, as well as *Pyrgus malvae* L. and *Erynnis tages* L., while several *Hemaris fuciformis* L.

were noted by other visitors. The next day, the 4th, I was in Alice Holt Forest at 82°F even without full sun. Many Whites were flying, and I flushed a female *Cynthia mendica*, which later provided a host of ova from which the larvae fed up rapidly. In the afternoon, I joined Dr. John Holmes at Lindford near Bordon. We went to some woods in Woolmer Forest, but it had become overcast and sultry and little was moving except a few Pierids. This was the last day of the heat wave, and it was much cooler on June 7th when I flew to Greece on a tour of the central and northern regions, returning two weeks later on the 21st, to find more equable temperatures in the lower 60's with on the whole a late season. It was sunny and a good deal cooler when I went to the Durfold woods on the afternoon of the 25th, but only saw a few Wood Whites. I was once more in Alice Holt Forest on June 28th, and was surprised to find so little on the wing at this optimum period with only a few *Maniola jurtina* L. On the last day of the month, *Plebeius argus* Rott. was just starting to appear on Chobham Common, where I ran a Heath light later, attracting only a few micros.

The second half of the year opened with some very rainy and cool conditions which had hardly improved when I motored to Kent on July 7th but the only visitor to a Heath light in the Orlestone woods that night was an *Apatele megacephala* L. It was dull and rainy on the 8th, but much brighter and warm on the 9th when I was at Dungeness in the morning, though nothing was at rest on the posts. Later that day I motored to the downs near Otford and Eynsford where nothing seemed to be flying. After calling on Col. and Mrs. Manley at Otford, I was back in Surrey to be welcomed by a marked return of warmth, with the thermometer once more in the 70's. On July 12th, I was again with Dr. Holmes in the Woolmer Forest region, where we only saw a few Meadow Browns and Large Skippers, but a further visit to King's Park Wood on the 14th produced many more insects including the first *Limenitis camilla* L. and *Argynnis paphia* L. but only males. There were many *M. jurtina* with a few *P. oegeria* and *L. sinapis*. It was fine and warm on the 16th which saw me again in Alice Holt Forest, where I met other lepidopterists, one of whom spotted a freshly emerged male *Apatura iris* L. sitting in the main ride after seeing others sailing high round tops of oaks. In an adjoining enclosure there were a few *L. camilla* among firs wreathed with honeysuckle bowers. Later that day *P. argus* was in full spate on part of Chobham Common.

On July 18th, I flew to Morocco, returning on the 29th after a very hot sojourn in North Africa, to find the month ending on a cool and rainy note. These conditions prevailed on the 30th, when I was once more in Alice Holt where there seemed to be no butterflies moving. However, in spite of a dull day on August 1st, quite a number of insects were on the wing in King's Park Wood. Fairly fresh *L. camilla* were still to be seen, together with quite a few female *A. paphia* which had

another good season in that area. The summer broods of *P. rapae* and *P. napi* were out, but there was still an occasional *L. sinapis* as well as many *M. jurtina* and a few *Ochlodes venata* Br. & Grey.

On August 4th I set out for East Anglia which I had not visited in the summer since 1975. En route my first halt was on Royston golf course, where besides many *P. napi*, I only saw a few *Zygaena filipendulae* L. but no *Lysandra coridon* Poda. My next stop was on the golf course at Mildenhall, where I was glad to see a good growth of *Silene otites*, but there was no sign of larvae of *Anepia irregularis* Hufn. As in 1975 my next haven was just outside Saxthorpe in Norfolk, where my host was Mr. Tony Palmer who kindly let me plug in my static m.v. trap at his home overlooking a marsh with good results. The two nights which were relatively mild, attracted just over 300 individuals embracing 43 macro species comprising a dozen *Laothoë populi* L., but only a single *Deilephila elpenor* L. The only Notodonts were *Pheosia tremula* Clerck and *P. gnoma* F. Arctiids were well to the fore with at least a dozen *Arctia caja* L. and over twenty *Eilemea lurideola* Zinck. and a single *Comacla senex* Hübn. Besides *Euproctis similis* L. and *Philudoria potatoria* L., the only other Bombycid was *Drepana falcataria*. The noctuids were well represented by 28 species. Both *Euxoa nigricans* L. and *E. tritici* L. were quite numerous with many *Caradrina blanda*, *Apamea monoglypha* L. and *A. secalis* L. *Euschesis janthina* D. & S., *E. pronuba* L. with a few *Apamea lithoxyla* D. & S., *Procus furuncula* D. & S. and singletons of *Plusia gamma* L., *P. iota* L. and *P. chrysitis* L. Of ten species of geometers the most spectacular was a fresh *Geometra papilionaria* L. with *Lygris mellinata* F., *L. pyraliata* D. & S., *Croallis elinguarina* L., *Selenia bilunaria* Esp., *Hydriomena furcata* L., *Ouropteryx sambucaria* L., and *Biston betularia* L. A very dull day met us on August 5th when my host and I spent first on Kelling Heath which only provided some *Ortholitha palumbaria* and later in the fen below his house where a few *Maniola tithonus* L. were flushed. The next morning of August 6th I motored to Cley-next-Sea to visit Mr. Patrick Kearney whose m.v. trap had been equally productive during the previous nights. It harboured several *Heliophobus albicolon* Hübn. and *Cucullia asteris* D. & S. among a good assortment of commoner insects. That afternoon I proceeded via Norwich through a violent thunderstorm and deluge to the Suffolk coast putting up at the Randolph Hotel near Reydon on the outskirts of Southwold. This had been my haven on many earlier visits to this delectable region of East Anglia. I went out after dark to a large marsh known as Potters Bar where a Heath light only attracted a single *Pterostoma palpina* Clerck and a few *Apamea secalis* L. The morning of the 7th saw me at Minsmere under dull conditions with nothing moving, not even the five spoonbills which made that famous spot their summer quarters. Later I went to Walberswick to see Mr. David Chipperfield and accompanied him to

Dunwich Forest where we dislodged by beating branches a few *Abraxas sylvata* Scop. That evening we were joined by Mr. George Antram. It was our intention to run our lights in the marsh just below the well-known wartime pillbox, but to our dismay we found a fence had been erected preventing us reaching the desired area. We therefore resorted to the big marsh adjoining Dunwich where we operated our light till nearly midnight, but a dew descended and little was seen except for a couple of *Arenostola brevilinea* Fenn, with single examples of *A. phragmitidis* Hübn. and *Apamea oblonga* Haworth with several *Cosmotriche potatoria* L., *A. secalis* and *E. janthina*. The next day, the 8th I spent in dull and rainy weather first on the Walberswick sandhills and in the afternoon on those at Thorpeness where nothing of interest appeared. On August 9th I had another wet and dull day when I returned to Surrey via Bury St. Edmunds and Newmarket.

(To be continued)

CONSERVATION OF WILD CREATURES AND WILD PLANTS (AMENDMENT) BILL (H.L.).—According to the published report in *Hansard* (Vol. 398, No. 35, column 1,185) on the Amendment to the Wild Plants and Animals Conservation Bill in the Lords, the following exchange took place on 13th February 1979:

‘Viscount SIMON: In that case, I should like to ask the noble Lord who is in charge of the Bill one question, of which I have given him notice. I was a little surprised, and so were some of my lady friends, to find among the species we are seeking to protect something called the Barberry Carpet moth. Unless its name belies its characteristics, I wonder whether it is a moth which consumes carpets and, if so, whether we are wise to give it this “endangered” qualification which will seek to ensure its survival. In any case, I would say that if anybody saw a moth eating his carpet I am afraid he would stamp on it first and find out later whether or not it was the Barberry Carpet moth. I wonder whether the noble Lord can help me?’

‘Lord SKELMERSDALE: I am happy to relieve the noble Viscount’s mind. The Barberry Carpet Moth is one which some people would have us believe looks a little like a Persian carpet and it lives on the barberry plant. The barberry plant is being removed at a rate of knots — not least, I should say, by the noble Baroness’ Department in one or two of its operations. For that reason, if for no other, it needs protection under this Bill. Incidentally, should any moth shown in one of these Schedules be found to be eating a carpet, the householder would be an authorised person and would be quite at liberty to stamp on it!’

— E. H. WILD. 112 Foxearth Road, Selsdon, Croydon, Surrey CR2 8EF.